DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 423 684 FL 025 486

AUTHOR Gray, Mark Louis
TITLE Don't Forget the Home Language. Creating a Community of Learners in Second Language Classrooms.
PUB DATE 1998-03-00
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (March 17-21, 1998).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; *English (Second Language); *Language Maintenance; *Language Role; Language Skills; Language Teachers; *Languages; Skill Development; Student Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Teachers of English as a Second Language are encouraged to provide support for home language maintenance and use in classroom writing assignment. It is argued that this supports cultural diversity rather than emphasize differences among students, helps in development of literacy and other cognitive skills, and empowers students to achieve and persist. Several classroom activities are described, all of which encourage risk-taking, pride in native culture, and social interaction while being acceptive of the abilities students bring to the classroom. The activities include creation of classroom posters, making bookmarks as gifts, labeling foods and common objects, vocabulary development as a pre-writing exercise, and classroom cooking. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 423 684

Don't Forget the Home Language

Creating a Community of Learners in Second Language Classrooms

by

Mark Louis Gray

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Mark L Gray
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

FL025486

INTRODUCTION

Writing in Home Languages

As classrooms become increasingly diverse linguistically and culturally, teachers are facing the challenge of providing language instruction to children who differ not only in English ability but also in life experiences and native language proficiency. Encouraging children to complete writing assignments in their first language provides each student with an opportunity to succeed in a language activity, and sharing products helps create a community of learners enriched by the diversity of their learning environment rather than divided by their differences. The scaffolding effect of these experiences helps to create the sense of belonging and achievement required for further development of English skills.

Rationale

Teaching English as a Second Language is, at its core, literacy instruction. We encourage, implore, prod, trick, bribe, and beg our students to listen, speak, read, and write. While instruction is directed at achieving Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, the process requires that students develop ever greater skills in those four

literacy functions. To define literacy as only English literacy not only represents a narrow, ethnocentric view of literacy, it further ignores the literacy skills students possess in their native language. Teachers who recognize these skills and encourage students to use them as a place to begin writing in English give themselves a tool for exploring the competencies of their students while providing learners with an opportunity to succeed in a literacy activity.

There is a sociocultural factor to consider as well. Cummins (1989) suggests a learning situation which empowers students to achieve their maximum learning potential by instilling in them a positive self-concept. He goes on to say that when a program accepts the language and culture of its students they develop the confidence to become engaged in their learning process. He suggests that schools incorporate minority students' language and culture into the school program and that they encourage minority community participation as an integral part of the children's education.

According to Vygotsky (1978), all human learning occurs as an outcome of interaction with others. Through these interactions, learners progress from their current level of learning to the next. The teachers, peers, parents, and others who participate in the learning process provide the support for learners as they attempt increasingly difficult tasks. According to Krashen (1982), L2 acquisition occurs in an environment that seeks to minimize fear, nervousness, and self-consciousness.

The activities described here encourage risk-taking, pride in the native culture and social interaction while accepting the abilities of students as they arrive in the classroom. The emphasis is on participation and keeping the affective filter lowered. Writing is tough enough for kids. Our job is to make it easier, and here are some ways to do that.

STRATEGIES

Creating Classroom Posters

One of the simplest and most effective ways to show respect for the learners' languages and cultures is to include environmental print in the students' own languages in your classroom. The posters can take the form of inspirational signs, responses to literature, folk sayings, or declarations of pride in a student's homeland. Obviously, these are only a few ideas; what you can do with posters is only limited by your imagination and that of your students and colleagues. I get more ideas by visiting other classrooms than by any other method. All environmental print contributes to literacy development. Filling your room with posters in students' first languages communicates your support for the students and what they are bringing into the classroom. In addition, when parents visit your room, they are going to notice the way you are reaching out to their children.

Also:

- Simple materials
- Every child can participate
- Children can teach each other
- Great way to discover talent
- Fun
- Classroom always looks great
- Gives students ownership

Making Bookmarks as Gifts

Bookmarks are great gift items to make in class. They are simple to produce and are just large enough to allow a little writing. In my classroom, we make several early in the year to present to visitors. No one gets out of there without a bookmark. There should be at least one occasion for which each child can make a gift for someone they know. Let the children choose someone to present with their gift.

Don't let the simplicity of this activity put you off. Making bookmarks underscores the importance of books in your classroom, and there are several literacy activities that can properly precede or follow the actual craftwork. These are just a few examples:

- Make a book about the process
- Language Experience Stories
- Discuss giving in different cultures
- Write the instructions for the process on posters and display
- Create gift cards to accompany gifts
- Describe your recipient
- Tell how it feels to give a gift

Labeling Foods and Common Objects

This is a game. You will need to assemble a collection of things for examination and sharing. It is best to have between 10 and 20 things, and they must not be too large to pass around. The class sits in a circle on the floor and the teacher has all the objects close at hand. Beginning with the teacher, each person holds the object in his/her hand and tells the class the name of the object in their language. Children who are silent can listen and take their turn passing. Now the objects are hidden from sight and students are given paper and pencils. Tell them to remember as many things as they can and write the names. They can write in English or in their language.

When the lists are written, have the students share their products in small groups. Then they are ready to make posters. Have each student choose 5-8 items in the home language for their poster. You can assign criteria at this point (3 foods and 3 clothing items, etc.). Create posters on large posterboards; have the students illustrate in color. If you can, let each student hang their poster where they choose in the room.

Concept Development

After a prewriting activity, have the students respond in writing to get them used to the vocabulary of the assignment to come. This is an excellent time to assess readiness for the first draft of the final product. Children who understand the concept under discussion but lack the English to write a response will write in their own language when you indicate that this is not only acceptable but good.

Classroom Cooking

This is a fantastic way to begin getting parents involved in your classroom. Begin the process with ongoing homework. Each night, the students record what they have had for dinner. With their parents' help, they write the name of each food in their home language. In a separate column, they write the English word for the same food. Keep this going for a couple of weeks, stressing the parental role.

After two weeks, send a letter home to parents asking for volunteers to come to school and cook a family recipe from the home country with the class. Parents who might not ordinarily volunteer to help are likely to feel more comfortable about coming to school when they can share this simple thing from their culture. The children will be really excited because they know they'll be cooking and eating, so the parent can count on a warm welcome. If you are really lucky, the parent might know a story from the home country to accompany the recipe. Ask the parent to send you the recipe in their language so you can copy it onto posters and hang it in the classroom.

When your food activities are finished, have a final celebration with a foodfest. This means asking each family to send a dish from their native cuisine to school for lunch on the day of the celebration. What is different about this lunch is you want the parents to come and eat with the class. Have the classroom decorated in recognition of the community and its many cultures, play music from the families' collections, and have lots of student work on display for the parents to browse through as they dine.

Conclusion

Language minority students, like all students, deserve recognition for what they can do from teachers who can show them how to start where they are and lend them the instructional support needed to progress. Native language skills are real academic tools; the teacher's job is to communicate that to the student and show him/her what to do next.

REFERENCES

Cummins, J. (1989). *Empowering Minority Students*. Sacramento: California Association for Bilingual Education.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. New York: Pergamon Press.

Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.